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ABSTRACT

This report describes the British Voluntary Service Organization (VSO) training model and its implications for teacher education. VSO posts teachers with experience in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or mainstream education to teacher training posts in countries in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. All volunteers must participate first in a skills training course in England that includes professional teaching, country specific, and health and general briefings. The methodology involves a team of trainers who work with a core belief that to become a trainer you need to experience planning, delivering, and evaluating training events. Initial stages are tutor-planned and tutor-lead, to ensure that all participants are up-to-date on current thinking on core English Language Training (ELT) topics and methodologies. The remainder of the course is negotiated with participants who choose sessions to plan and deliver as a team with the tutors. Courses have been generally well-received by participants. The only negative reaction led to a course maximum limit of 20 participants. Pre-planned and completed timetables for a typical course are appended. (NAV)

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LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE
VOLUNTARY SECTOR
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ABSTRACT

VSO posts teachers with experience in EFL or mainstream education to teacher training posts in countries in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe. Before departure, all volunteers participate in skills training courses in UK.

In 1986 the need to train experienced teachers who were going to work as teacher trainers led to a training the trainer course in which the trainees were responsible for devising their own intensive training course in co-operation with the VSO trainers. This was a marked change from the tutor directed core+options model of ELT training that had been hitherto been offered.

Since then, VSO has developed a model of training facilitated by a team of trainers, all with experience of relevant working contexts and with an awareness of current teacher training methods, who work with a core belief that to become a trainer you need to experience planning, delivering and evaluating training events. The initial stages of any training the trainer course are tutor-planned and tutor-led with the aims of ensuring that all participants are up-to-date with current thinking on core ELT topics and of providing a wide range of methods as a professional springboard. After this period, the remainder of the course timetable is negotiated within the participants, who then choose sessions to plan and deliver as a team with the tutors.

In this paper the current model and its implications for teacher education for sustainable development are outlined.

LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

BIOGRAPHIES

Aileen Bloomer taught EFL in Sweden and Germany before moving into ESP as part of the Swedish development project in Bai Bang, Vietnam. She is currently working in Linguistics and Modern Languages at the University College of Ripon and York St John and spent 1992-1993 on secondment to the British Council, working at Shanghai Jiao Tong University. She has been one of the VSO team of ELT teacher trainers for ten years, mostly working on their ELT courses and the ELT teacher Trainer courses

Felicity Breet taught English in a British secondary school before being accepted as a VSO volunteer. After five years as a teacher trainer in Nigeria and two organising a new INSET project for ELT teacher trainers at the University of Nanjing, Peoples Republic of China she became the English Adviser to an ODA funded English/Maths/Physics project in Anglophone Cameroon. The research which grew out of this post led to her PhD in 1993. She currently directs short EAP courses for International students and short INSET courses for International teachers of English at the University of Sunderland.

LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

A paper based on one given at the second International conference
"Language in Development" held in Bali Indonesia April 1995

VSO-AN INTRODUCTION

VSO enables men and women to work alongside people in poorer countries in order to share skills, build capabilities and promote international understanding and action, in pursuit of a more equitable world. It is based in London but operates in the Netherlands and Canada as well as in the UK. Each year, 1000 volunteers of all ages and from all walks of life are recruited. Governments and organisations in more than 50 countries ask for volunteers, with specific skills, who are willing to share their skills with their colleagues overseas.

VSO values the individual and believes in the equal right of all to realise their potential. It values the learning and friendship that results from people living and working alongside each other in pursuit of shared goals.

VSO offers all volunteers a range of pre-departure training courses, some skills specific and other multi-disciplinary aimed at adapting existing skills and acquiring new ones. In 1985, courses offered in the UK to prospective ELT volunteers included some professional training lasting up to ten days, some country specific briefing (7-10

length), general orientation, including a health briefing lasted two or three days and some language courses of three weeks where no language training was provided in country. Motorcycle training was offered to those volunteers who would need transport for their work.

In 1995, a half day health workshop is offered, motorcycle training lasts 3-5 days. No language courses take place in the UK and ELT professional courses last no longer than a week.

There are two main training cycles in a year and in each cycle the following ELT courses are offered: ELT for China, ELT for African Secondary Schools, EFL, ELT for Primary Schools and ELT for Teacher Trainers. These residential courses take place at VSO's permanent Training Centre in Birmingham UK where up to 20 volunteers and 4 tutors work from 9.00am to 9.00pm (5 sessions a day each lasting about 1.5 hours). A wide range of resources are available in the permanent resource centre.

THE CHALLENGE

From the selected volunteers VSO invites those they consider appropriate for posts in Language Teacher Education to a course a simultaneously recruits four tutors who may or may not have worked together before. All of these tutors (who are not all UK based) will have recent and relevant teacher training experience in Britain and/or overseas. For the tutors, the first challenge is to establish themselves as a team, a process normally begun at a pre-course tutors meeting when the aims of the course are clarified by a full time VSO training office.

Thereafter, they have to agree a timetable. The issue here is that the volunteers come from such a diverse range of professional qualifications and experience, of language background and awareness, of overseas experience and of training experience both as trainers and as trainees. They have been posted to an equally diverse range of countries contexts and jobs. Some jobs will be entirely within an institution, others will be peripatetic ; some will be concerned with English teachers at secondary level and some at tertiary level of education; some will be established posts and others will be new; some will be in an EFL context, others where the English is an official language. Perhaps the most difficult jobs to consider are those where the job description is less well defined.

The tutors have to consider where the volunteers are coming from in terms of their preparations for departure as well as their potentially different learning styles. the need to sustain and maximise learning during 12 hour days is yet another major consideration.

Mindful of the need to provide a course during which all participants, both tutors and volunteers, will have hands on experience of identifying training needs and wants, the planning and facilitating of relevant workshop activities and the need to provide high quality professional refreshment, a process has evolved whereby the volunteers will participate in sessions which give them the opportunity to update their ideas about English Language Teaching and teacher training and to relate these to new learning environments.

Ten years ago, most ELT courses were designed by the tutors, each session was pre-planned and tutor directed. The volunteers were expected to "fit in" with the tutors' informed perceptions of their needs. In response to volunteer evaluations, later courses adopted a core+options model. These also allowed opportunities for more professionally experienced volunteers to share their expertise and for new types of post to be accommodated. For a small group of highly qualified and experienced volunteers going to INSET posts, a logical development from core+option training was to ask the volunteers to design and facilitate their own short training course, under the guidance of the tutors, - VSO's first foray into experiential training of trainers. Although this first experience was successful, the need to provide training for a greater number of volunteers that their training should be shortened, led to further discussion of this mode of training.

The present model takes into account the need for a large group to begin working together as a group, before all the individuals in the group will feel able to articulate their training needs and wants. Thus, using the course that ran in January 1994 as an exemplar, 3 main elements stand out: the initial phase, the negotiating phase and the coping phase.

The Initial Phase

The initial phase, which lasted two days, was pre-planned, tutor-facilitated and focused on traditional ELT topics such as evaluating language learning, teaching the four language skills in very large classes, course planning, grammar awareness, teaching pronunciation and presenting new language. The tutors aimed to provide models of

a range of workshop practice, ranging from lectures, problem-solving activities to guided fantasies, supplemented by the use of videos of English lessons in a number of different countries. Course materials were deliberately well produced and the volunteers were encouraged to monitor both content and training methodology, by keeping notes on both. (See Figure 1 Pre-Planned Timetable)

The participants were divided into small group for daily tutorials where the focus of attention was questions such as "What did you hope to learn yesterday? Did you learn it? How can we help you learn more today? How would you change the course if you were a tutor?". They were encouraged to use specially allocated sessions for self briefing, which included looking at videos, talking to returned volunteers where possible and making use of published ELT materials and materials produced in the countries, to which they were posted where available. By the end of the phase, a group identity has been established.

This brought us to the end of the pre-planned sessions on the timetable which the volunteers had received on arrival. The remainder of the timetable had now to be negotiated.

Negotiating the Timetable

The volunteers were given time to examine their job descriptions, to identify the detailed requirements of their post. They were then able, with support, to determine which of these aspects they felt confident about and which they wanted to explore in more depth. Once this individual reflective period had been completed the volunteers worked

in small groups to produce a composite list showing all the needs of the group members. A tutor scribed for each group and assisted with the careful labelling of training needs and wants. These group lists were displayed for the whole group to consider and then combined into one list which indicated how many people wanted to work on each topic.

On this course, as on many others, the list looked completely unmanageable. However, with all the tutors acting as scribes, the volunteers' responsibility was to ensure that each label was now transferred onto a small piece of card or that labels are combined in such a way that nothing got lost. The tutors had also prepared a large wall timetable which firstly was divided into sessions according to the volunteers' requests re the length and timing of sessions. A small group consisting of volunteers and tutors then arranged these cards onto the timetable, taking into account such matters as variety of topic for planning, more self briefing and some free time.

After a short break, the whole group reassembled to consider the timetable as proposed, to ensure that each individual could get all the sessions they wished to when there were two (or more) sessions running simultaneously and to suggest any other changes. It is always important that this phase is allocated sufficient time. In 1994, it took about an hour to finalise the timetable at this stage. Further amendments were suggested and acted upon during the tutorial sessions that ran every day for the rest of the course. (See Figure Two Complete Timetable)

At this point, the volunteers were encourage to sign up as planners and facilitators for any sessions where they had expertise and/or a special interest. These planning groups were limited to 3 volunteers. Once the planning groups were formed, each tutor selected a topic where they felt that they had particular skills and/or experience to share and then the remainder of the sessions were divided between them. At this stage, we moved into the coping (phase 3).

The Coping Stage

There are always requests for sessions which are of obvious interest and importance but which no one in the group feels able to lead for the position of expert. This phenomenon has increased as the posts have become more varied and the volunteers more experienced and January 1994 was no exception. In the planning groups for these sessions, the tutor's responsibility was to model possible approaches to planning a training event where the focus was something outside their previous experience. In other words, these were truly shared training events and it was during these sessions in particular that the tutors experienced their own professional refreshment.

The timetable was now established and after one planning session the tutors let one last 'traditional session. From here on, volunteers facilitated all the sessions with support for their planning tutor. The

whole team of planners usually made a contribution to the presentation and evaluated their own sessions immediately afterwards. The final timetable for the course in 1994 is shown below.

As participants consider the possible content for their workshop, the tutor acted as a 'relevance filter' constantly requiring the team to adapt their ideas to suit both the existing course group and their future trainees overseas. As the content was agreed the tutor monitored the methods chosen. In some groups, more experienced trainers were challenged to try methods new to the, e.g. to give a lecture, to work without any paper resources or electrical equipment so that all volunteer participants did truly extend their practical experience.

At the daily tutor meetings tutors reviewed the progress of all planning teams, ensuring that sessions to be held on the same day were likely to make use of different training activities and that the needs of all participants would be met. The level of confidence of all individuals was also monitored ensuring that all participants were sharing existing skills and learning new one. this is essential so that tutors can assure VSO that quality training has been provided.

Conclusion - the future.

These course have generally been well evaluated by volunteers both pre departure and after some time in post. A correlation between a negative reaction to the courses and large training group size was noted. This has been resolved by limiting each group to a maximum of 20 participants including tutors.

Indeed, several volunteers who participated in course in the early 1990s have since returned and become tutors themselves. This seems to be a very positive development. Other positive evaluations have included reference to the value of non-native speakers of English developing their confidence as trainers techniques, from which they can both select and generalise to create new solutions to problems both old and new. As more VSO volunteers move into multiplier posts in teacher education and development, courses such as these which enable participants to become trainers in a supportive environment pre-departure will inevitably remain a useful model for VSO and other agencies in the voluntary sector.

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PRE-PLANNED TIMETABLE

	Tuesday 4th	Wednesday 5th	Thursday 6th	Friday 7th	Saturday 8th	Sunday 9th	Monday 10th	Tuesday 11th
8 45-9 00		TUTOR GROUPS						
9 00-10 30		Grammar	Writing	Structured Self-Briefing				
10 30-11 00		COFFEE						
11 00-12 30		Listening	Vocabulary	Negotiating & Establishing the Timetable				Evaluation
12 30-1 00		TUTORS' MEETING						
1 00-2 00		LUNCH			1.30-2.30 VSO Management Talk	LUNCH		
2 00-3 30		Speaking	Reading	2.00-2.30 Completing the Timetable				
3.30-4 00		TEA		2.30-4 00 Good Teaching Good Training	TEA			
4 00-5 30	Tutors' Meeting	Pronunciation	Evaluating Language Learning	4 30-6 30 VSO Health Talk				
	DINNER				DINNER			
7.00-7 30	Introduction Icebreaker	Self - Briefing	Self - Briefing					
7 30-8.30	Language Lesson	Video Experience						
8 30-8 45	Preface Tutor Groups							

Tutors. Aileen Bloomer
Felicity Breat
June Lindsay
Benedict Mabele Masaga
Gillian Robson
Saite Saine

VSO Staff Sally Drewe
Bronwen Richards

Fig. 1.

COMPLETE TIMETABLE

	Tuesday 4th	Wednesday 5th	Thursday 6th	Friday 7th	Saturday 8th	Sunday 9th	Monday 10th	Tuesday 11th
8.45-9.00		TUTOR GROUPS						
9.00-10.30		Grammar	Writing	Structured Self Briefing	Teaching Large Classes	Planning Teaching Practice	INSET - central / outreach? Planning	Managing and sustaining change
10.30-11.00		COFFEE						
11.00-12.30		Listening	Vocabulary	Negotiating & Establishing the timetable.	Planning	Planning	Team Building	VSO Course Evaluation
12.30-1.00		TUTORS' MEETING						
1.00-2.00		LUNCH			1.30-2.30 VSO Management Talk	LUNCH		
2.00-3.30		Speaking	Reading	2.00-2.30 Completing the timetable 2.30-4.30 Good teaching: Good Training	2.30-3.30 Methodology	2.00-2.30 Planning INSET	Evaluating outcomes	
3.30-4.00		TEA						
4.00-5.30	Tutors' Meeting	Pronunciation	Evaluating Language Learning		Tch beg Lib Dra me	Workshops	Producing Materials	
	DINNER				DINNER			
7.00-7.30	Introduction Icebreaker	Self briefing	Self-briefing	Planning	ELT Associations	Pro	Needs Analysis	Extra-curricular activities
7.30-8.30	Language Lesson	Video Experience			Language Activities	Grammar	I.T. Reading	
8.30-8.45	Preface tutor Groups							

Tutors:
Aileen Bloomer
Felicity Breet
June Lindsay
Benedict Mabele Messa
Gillian Robson
Sara Saine

VSO Staff: Sally Drews
Bronwen Richards

Fig. 2.